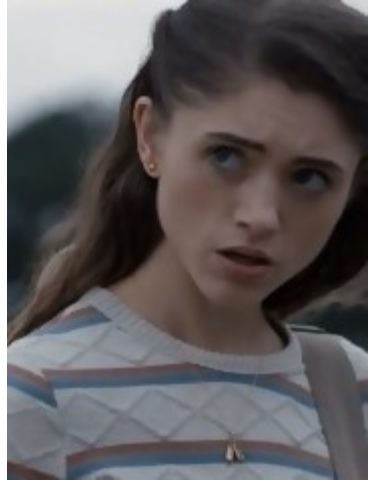

The Ballad of Joyce Byers by Be Obscene

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Summary: In this 'What-if' story, Joyce is a woman living on her own away from everyone. Nancy is a girl that shut herself off from her peers. Both are changed after tragedy but might find ways to heal together. Mature theme and some sexual content.

1. Chapter 1

So in this a 'What if?' story it of course will be AU and I decided to make it modern day but it will still be very much like the show. I'm also not sure yet if this will ever get particularly graphic or that sexual but for now I will rate it T for now. I hope to find out what you guys think.

Another day. Joyce didn't want to get out of bed. She's done that before. These days she finds herself waking up at the crack of dawn, maybe just to keep herself sane. The windows were always covered in curtains, some painted over. She was practically agoraphobic now. She ventured outside only to tend to her garden but that had to have been months ago. Time was different in that tiny one story house of hers. She brewed herself some coffee. She had no where to go, no one to see anymore. She paced the kitchen, waiting impatiently for the coffee. She passed by the picture of her youngest son. That hair that was well overdue to be cut. He was just an average kid, had friends, went out into the woods to make a fort. She hadn't seen him in 2 years. No one had.

"Ms. Byers?" A young man called from outside; he'd been knocking several times but Joyce had been so deep in thought she didn't notice.

She knew who it was, the young man that delivered her groceries nearly 5 days a week. She had only ever seen him a hand full of times.

"Just leave it on the step, James!" She shouted.

"...um...I was uh wondering...it's past the first of the month and was hoping maybe..."

"My cheque hasn't come in yet...is it out there?" She waited by the door. The sound of a rusted mail box cover opening and just as quickly shut.

"No."

"I'm sorry...just give me a little more time ok?"

There was an uncomfortable pause. "Ok. Have a good day!"

She waited for him to leave, peeking out the window like she expected a gun shot. She opened the door, looked around. Her home was so far from the edge of town that no one ventured out that way, well not any more any way. She still couldn't scrub all the paint someone slapped on the front of the house; you could still make out 'BITCH'. She grabbed the brown paper bags and headed back inside.

Nancy stayed in her room, reading almost religiously. Her parents, well her mother any way, wanted her to drop the anti-social act and start hanging out with kids her own age. Nancy was never really an outcast but she never felt part of any clique. Her best friend vanished 2 years ago without a trace. No one knew what happened, she would have been considered more of a nerd at school, she was probably the nicest person Nancy had ever met. This tall, redheaded girl that was excluded from most peer activities but never fussed about it.

Nancy remembered the last night she saw her. She convinced her to go to a party with her. She clearly wasn't into it but accompanied Nancy anyway which Nancy took as her having her back because she didn't really know these kids that well. She ended up drinking and abandoning her to go upstairs and make out with a hunk named Steve. Nothing really went too far before they passed out. But she was gone. No letter to her parents, a text or phone call to her. The cops found her car but figured she hopped a bus and skipped town.

Nancy's mother barged into her room, "Nancy!"

She looked up from her book, startled, "Mom? Could you please knock?"

"You have to stop this," she took the book right out of her hands; she looked over the cover disgusted, images of a starry night and half naked creatures. "What is this?"

"It's the third volume of Kesher's Tale...it...," Nancy bit her bottom lip, "It's not as bad as it looks."

"Are you still into this sci-fi garbage?"

Nancy nodded, "It's really well written."

"Nancy, you can't shut the world out. You never even used to like this stuff. I tried ignoring the movies you watch. Everything you do is just...I miss you."

"I'm not that different...Dr. Hamilton said I just needed to find an escape."

"Yes but now it's time to face the real world," she opened the blinds; Nancy shielded her eyes from the sun, "Get outside. You look like a vampire!"

"Nobody wants to hang out any more! Not since...," she couldn't even say her name, that's how much it still hurt.

"Barb is gone, Nancy. It's time to move on."

"They never even tried to find her! It's that lab up in the woods, some how they're behind it!"

Karen cringed at her daughter's story, she'd heard them time and time again like Barb was murdered or they have her prisoner, she's being experimented on.

"Enough, Nancy! You want to live like a hermit? Go move in with Joyce Byers because you sound exactly like her!"

"Well maybe she's right!" Nancy argued.

Karen rolled her eyes, "Fine. Make a tin foil hat and pack your bags!"

Nancy groaned and lied back onto her bed. Karen was at the door but had more to say, "If you don't leave the house tomorrow I'm cancelling the internet."

"You couldn't," she said sitting up.

"No but I will change the password. Monitor you."

Nancy dreaded the thought of going out any where in town, school was bad enough. She knew how people talked, she was the crazy girl, the weirdo. After her mom left she couldn't help but think about Joyce Byers. Her brother Will was friends with her son, they played Dungeons and Dragons in their basement; a game she never in a million years thought she would ever play or be invested in. She had maybe only seen her once when she came over to pick him up but that was some time ago. No one had seen her, after her estranged husband took her older son Johnathan with him she shut herself off from everyone.

The next day she decided to go to the local market. She thought she wouldn't be bothered there; no one her age would be around. She would spend maybe forty minutes there and go to the park then back to the comfort of the lair she made for herself. Some older people did give her the odd look here and there as she made it to the frozen aisle. Seeing her reflection she could see why; her frizzy, unmanageable hair in a ponytail, pale skin and rings around her sunken in eyes.

"You could use a spa day," a young male employee said as he came by, stalking the cooler next to her.

She frowned, prepared a hand to smack him, "Shut up, James."

"I thought you only came out at night. What did you come for the Eggos?"

"Does it look like I eat that crap"

He had a small laugh; Nancy was his cousin but he still liked to mess with her like she was a younger sister.

"Are you going to the big cool kid party? Heard it's at Billy Hargrove's."

"I don't even know who that is," she said passively.

"You only have a year left don't you?"

"Who cares? Do you really think I want to hang out with a bunch of kids that want nothing to do with me?"

"Yeah well that's my life. You could make an effort. Maybe not hangout at a grocery store when you have no intention to buy."

"I do plan on buying," she said confidentially.

James shook his head. "Well I gotta go make a delivery. So you won't have to disturb my work."

"How far do you have to go?"

"12 Elm street."

Nancy's ears perked up, "Wait who lives there?"

"Joyce Byers and she still owes money."

"Really?" Nancy followed him as he walked to another aisle.

"I already went out that way yesterday. Pain in the ass."

"Well I could go," Nancy said this without really thinking it through.

James stopped and looked at her, "You serious?"

"What? I want to help."

"I guess it makes sense."

"What makes sense?" He laughed to himself. She hated that shit eating grin he had, "Because we're both weird?"

"You said it not me."

"She's not really crazy...right?"

He shrugged, "Just leave the bags on her porch and ring the bell."

"What you don't take them in for her?"

"She doesn't let anyone inside."

Nancy frowned, it sounded so sad to her that she had no one there with her. "Ok. What about your money?"

"I'll get it next time. She might be creeped out if you're there. She doesn't like change in her routine."

"Oh."

"Are you sure you want to do this?"

Nancy thought hard and nodded, "Yeah. No problem."

"K. So you never planned on buying anything then. Supports my theory."

Nancy grabbed a box of Strawberry Pop tarts and stuck her tongue out at him.

She loaded the front basket of her old bicycle. She felt nervous, she couldn't figure why, it wasn't like Joyce had a violent history or anything. She wasn't sure what her true reason for going was. Maybe it was her own morbid curiosity.

End of chapter one. Hope you like it so far.

2. Chapter 2

Nancy attempts to interact with Joyce Byers but such a task is easier said than done. Some strong language. Thanks for following and as always leave a review!

For a woman that lived alone, Joyce didn't ask for much. A jug of milk, a carton of eggs, rice and a steak. Nancy hoped she had more in her fridge then what was in that basket. No one had travelled this way in some time. The Byers' house might as well have been in the middle of nowhere. Nancy didn't believe in ghosts but seeing that house with its old faded wood siding, missing shingles and an overgrown lawn with crabgrass it was like something out of Stephen King. She didn't even see any lights on. She had to be in there though.

She peddled up to the front porch. She had a bad feeling in the pit of her gut. The steps creaked under her feet. She set the bags down. She caught a shadow out of the corner of her eye. But it was nothing, just an old hanging flower pot. She paused, standing there just staring at the rusted doorbell. She felt like an idiot, how could she not even perform the simplest task? Finally she swallowed and pushed the button. She ran down the steps and to her bike but as she turned it to go she looked back at the door. Something kept telling her to get out of there but another voice was telling her to stay. She was stuck. Maybe the bell didn't work, maybe she had to knock a couple times.

Slowly she got off the bike and wandered up to the door. She knocked loudly three times. She tried peering through the windows but it was so dark inside. She knocked again. She walked to one end where you could look into the living room. No one. Old couch, coffee table with ash trays and magazines. She decided to try one more time. She went to the door. She stopped when she noticed it was open a crack. She looked up and saw an eyeball staring back at her. She gasped in fright.

"I heard you the first time. What do you want?" Joyce didn't open the door fully, Nancy could only see that tired, angry brown eye; for all she knew everything else was disfigured. Nancy had forgotten how to talk. "No solicitation," she said harshly.

"Um...I have your...groceries."

The eye frowned, "Where's James?"

Nancy felt like she had a rock stuck in her throat, "He...he was busy so I took over...it's all right here."

The eye continued to stare at her without blinking. "How do I know you're not from the government?"

"Uh..."

"Or worse?" Nancy tried to look away from the eye to collect herself. "I don't fool that easily. What did you bring me?"

"Well I...," Nancy reached for the bag but protested.

"Without looking!"

Nancy left the bag alone, "...Rice...steak..a jug of milk and eggs." She smiled nervously knowing that was it.

Joyce wasn't budging though. "What about my scratch tickets and flour?"

Nancy was perplexed, she shook her head. Joyce waited for her to check the bag. "No this is all that he gave me."

Joyce sighed, "Ok. Pass it to me. Wait a minute while I check." Nancy nodded. She passes it through the opening in the door. It was grabbed like it was being sucked in. The door was slammed in her face. Nancy stood there motionless, waiting awkwardly. The door opened slowly and Joyce stuck her head out a little. "Sorry...I have to be careful. But I thought I put flour down on the list."

"I could go get you some," Nancy smirked.

"Alright. And some Camels?"

"Sure. I'll be back in no time."

"I'll be timing you," Joyce said, curving a brow. Nancy smiled and

headed for her bike. "Um, young lady, my bag!"

"Sorry!" She ran back and handed her the full bag.

Maybe she wasn't so bad, she was very cautious; she still couldn't tell if she was only joking with her. Was she worried about the government? It would be interesting to see what she thought about the labarotory since it was only a couple miles from her up the hill.

Nancy returned to the store. James was hanging around outside on break. "Well, you're alive," he said bluntly.

"You forgot flour. Also she wants Camels."

"Wasn't on the list. Also I don't think they'd do very well in this climate."

"Ha! Ha!" Nancy mocked

"Well that's it. She's not getting anything else today."

"Come on, James, cut her some slack."

He was amused by her sudden sympathy but his break time was up. He wasn't giving the town crazy any more favors, the only reason they started performing this delivery service for her was because the manager took pity on her after her son went missing. Joyce used to work there. She took time off during the search and they made these deliveries no problem but then she quit altogether. She promised she would pay. Though these payments were more sporadic these days.

He was headed back inside when Nancy stood in his way. "I'll pay for it."

"Why do you care?"

"It's so rundown up there. Have you seen it?"

"Yes, Nancy," James sighed, "I rode up to her place for almost two years now. Remember?"

"I'll do deliveries from now on. I'll do it whenever."

James was taken back by her enthusiasm, this did mean something to her. "Fine. But if you take this on you have to make sure she pays." Nancy nodded. He wasn't really all that sensitive to the situation, he really just wanted her out of his hair.

Nancy raced back to the house. Joyce was already at the door; unless maybe she was standing there this whole time waiting.

"You're late," she said smirking.

Nancy handed her the new bag through the door. "I hope you have a good day, Ms. Byers. I'll see you soon."

"Wait. What's your name?" Joyce had a name stuck at the tip if her tongue of who she might be but kept coming up empty.

"Nancy," the girl smiled.

Joyce had been seeing Nancy deliver her groceries for almost three weeks. Though she never once offered her to come inside. She hadn't had any visitors in a long time. She did get her a glass of water once when she asked. Nancy respected Joyce's privacy but was also a well of questions. Joyce clearly wasn't looking to get very attached. She didn't have any friends and she content on keeping it that way.

One morning she decided to get up early. No coffee left. Nancy would be by with some Foldgers hopefully soon. She had toast. She was going to have something with it. For some reason she was very hungry that morning. She shoved nearly the entire thing into her mouth and chewed. But when she went to swallow, something went down the wrong pipe. She choked and coughed harshly. She attempted to give herself the Heimlich but it proved too difficult.

"Ms. Byers?" She heard a faint voice call from outside. Joyce was leaning against a kitchen chair, she couldn't keep herself up for long.

"Joyce!"

Nancy ran inside and got behind her. She reached around and put her fist under her diaphragm and added pressure with her other hand. She trusted without a sweat. Joyce almost looked ready to pass out.

The piece of toast fell to the floor.

More soon!

3. Chapter 3

Will Nancy and Joyce form a bond? Find out...now! Leave a comment if you'd like!

"Sorry, I don't entertain much," Joyce said, pouring tea into two mugs. She handed one to Nancy.

"It's ok. I understand...," Nancy sniffed the tea.

"I didn't drug it," Joyce said, kind of annoyed.

"Oh no, sorry", Nancy said; her cheeks started turning a little red, the last thing she wanted to do was insult the woman. She took a sip, Rosemary tea. "This is good. I never drank tea before."

Joyce sat at the table with her, "You mean your mother never made tea?"

"She does...I just never drink it..," Nancy shrugged passively.

Joyce smirked and said before she took a sip, "Yeah, my mom was a bitch too." Nancy felt guilty laughing but she did and took another sip. For a moment or two Joyce stared off at no where in particular. She was very stoic in her mannerisms. Nancy tried to think of something to say but Joyce finally decided to open her mouth, "James get tired of coming over here?"

"Uh no he just got promoted and..."

Joyce darted a glance her way, "Don't lie to me."

Nancy was intimidated by her straight talk, she couldn't exactly back away from her. She told her her version of the truth which was better than nothing in her opinion, "I agrees to take over...he wanted to end your route because you're kind of out of the way...but I thought that was unfair. No one should go hungry just because it's a minor inconvienence to someone else."

Joyce liked that, from what she could tell Nancy was a good kid, no reason to suspect anything to happen. "I'm sorry I've been a but short

tempered. I'm not the most social person."

Nancy shrugged, "Me neither."

"You must have to get back."

"I can stay a while longer. Is there anything else you need?"

Joyce shook her head, "I'm good. Thank you."

"You know...I could help around your house if you'd like...it's no trouble," she had such a tremble in her voice when she said this, afraid she'd offend her.

Joyce frowned a bit, not shaking eye contact. "That's..no that's too much trouble. A lot of work. I can't afford that."

"You wouldn't have to pay me for it."

This was making Joyce feel conflicted, she wasn't a charity case. "No...I...I know people talk about me...I know everyone thinks I'm nuts. You've heard kids at your school."

"No one has spoken to me other than my cousin. No one likes me."

Joyce was taken aback, "H-how come?"

Nancy didn't want to say, it seemed inappropriate since Barb vanished around the same time as Will.

"I...I don't know," she said, one of her eyes was welling.

Joyce hates seeing her like that, "Hey, come here," she opened her arms up to her. Nancy didn't hold back. Nancy felt embarassed doing this, she feared that the woman thought she was some kind of simpleton.

"Sorry...I should...I should go," she stood up immediately and walked to the door.

"Well...you can come back," Joyce began to say, "Any time."

Nancy smiled. Joyce smiled in a way that made it obvious she hadn't

in quite some time. She would be back again. No doubt about it. She had to wipe her eyes before she got on her bike. She almost didn't want to leave.

The next time she was asked to go to Joyce's she was told to take some soil, flower seeds and gloves. She was resurrecting her garden.

Joyce was standing outside with a dark hoodie on, smoking. It was a bit chilly out that morning.

"Hey, you're out," Nancy said, enthused.

"I'm not in jail," Joyce replied dryly.

"Are you gardening today?" She walked over with the bag.

"I...might," she moved awkwardly away from her to butt out her smoke.

"Oh," Nancy said, a tad disappointed, "I wouldn't mind helping."

"Well...ok. If you want to. I mean it's a free country."

Nancy thought that was strange, why was she acting like this?

"There's a lot of weeds that need pulling," she said as if to intentionally get her to leave.

Nancy shrugged, "That's alright."

"Ok. I thought so. Those gloves I bought are for you. I'll use my old ones."

It was a lot of work to fix up the old garden but Nancy found she didn't mind it despite not having much interest in the work before. They both got down on their hands and knees, pulled weeds and dug up the earth. Nancy wasn't wearing old clothes for this long and tedious task but she didn't mind wearing and dirtying the knees of her jeans. They both took a break for some water inside.

"Forgot how much of a workout that can be," Joyce poured two

glasses; her and Nancy went to grab the same glass with Nancy's hand on Joyce's .

"Oh..sorry," she said, retracting her hand.

"That's ok. You can have that one."

It was a taller glass. "You might need that one more than me."

"You paid for some of my groceries and saved my life so...," she laughed a bit.

"Ok ok. I see you pressuring me," Nancy joked and drank from the glass.

They finished up their work outside. Put in the soil and planted the flower seeds. Nancy was watering when she observed Joyce standing at the edge of her backyard. She was looking out at something.

"Hey, I don't have to go just yet. Did you maybe want to go for a walk or something? We could go up that trail that leads to that old stream."

Joyce was weiry. She pressed the back of her hand to her damp forehead. "I don't think that's a good idea."

"Oh. Ok. I'll see you soon then."

She was just going to go to her bike and head out of there when she heard, "Hey." She turned and saw Joyce holding her arms out for a hug. Nancy found her hug to be a lot tighter. She didn't want her to leave. "I remember you now."

Nancy's head rested on her shoulder. She had a sudden sinking feeling about this. "Huh?"

"It's ok," she faced her, her hands squarely on her shoulders, "I know my boy was friends with your brother. I thought I recognized you. Your friend was Barb. Right?" Nancy nodded. Joyce closes her eyes. About to cry. She swallowed. "I don't mind you coming by. I just haven't been too close with anyone in so long."

"O-ok. Maybe...maybe it's a good idea if you have my number. Just in case you want you know to have me pick stuff up sooner or...to talk."

Joyce smiled, not sarcastically, "I'd like that."

It was getting late. Nancy had to get going. It was overwhelming to have Joyce open up to her about this pain she was holding inside of her. While Nancy couldn't imagine what it would be like to lose a child but it was comforting knowing someone else could relate to the suffering one goes through when losing someone close.

"Nancy."

"Yes, Joyce?"

"Maybe go down the bumpier road by the old farmhouse. I think it would be safer. And for godsake stay away from that trail."

Nancy saw the scared look on her face but had to ask, "Why?"

"Trust me. You don't want to go anywhere near it."

"Ok," Nancy assured her. Maybe she thought whatever happened to Mike must've been on that trail. She read the police report though. Joyce was working late and her eldest son Jonathan was supposed to be watching him. He was gone without a trace.

To be continued...

4. Chapter 4

A bit of a delay but I'm back to continue this. Nancy learns more about Joyce and what she's been doing all this time. Please review!

"Where have you been?"

"Huh?" Nancy was spacing out twirling spegehitti on her fork mindlessly.

"I asked you where you've been," Her mother said firmly.

Mike, sitting across from Nancy mumbled, "She's been hanging out with Ms Byers..."

Nancy stopped eating and frowned at him.

"Nancy is this true?"

"I...I just run errands for her sometimes. I do for a lot of people. It's part of my job."

Mike smirked and said between bites, "Are you their maid too?" She kicked his shin under the table, "Hey!"

"Nancy...I do admire you getting out and doing something but I think maybe you should start mingling with kids your age."

Nancy couldn't be more irritated, "I already told you, no one wants to hang out with me!"

"Nancy, calm down. There's no need to go into hysterics."

Nancy rolled her eyes. Karen continued to eat once things quieted down. Ted had left the table long since, hardly paying any attention to the conversation.

"May I be excused?"

"You've hardly eaten," Karen scoffed. Nancy stayed against her better

judgement. "What do you even bring her?"

"Groceries," Nancy said, annoyed.

"She never steps foot out of that place. She may as well be a squatter in her own home. It looked filthy the last time I had the chance to see that house."

Nancy spoke up, "Actually it looks way better now. I helped her with her garden."

"She made you do all the work."

"No. She came outside and helped me," she frowned.

Karen shrugged and went back to eating. "You shouldn't frown so often. You'll get terrible wrinkles."

Nancy didn't even bother commenting after that. Without excusing herself she got up and agressively pushed her chair.

"Nancy!"

Nancy ran up to her room. She planted her face into her pillow. She caught Mike staring at her from out in the hallway.

"What?"

Mike stepped inside. He had this panicked face, "You have to stop seeing her."

Nancy sat up, "Excuse me?"

"Everyone's been bullying me online. I need you to stop."

Nancy shook her head, she couldn't believe him, "What are people saying?"

"They saw you helping her. Everyone knows you see her like everyday. They call her the Hawkins' Witch. You're like her assistant. Some people at school stopped talking to me."

"I'm...I'm sorry about that but that's not my fault."

"It's all your fault!"

"Mike..."

"Everything was finally going back to normal and then you had to do this."

She had never been more confused, "What? Mike, she lost her son. Your best friend..."

"He's gone. People have to move on."

Her eyes started to well, "But..."

"Just snap out of it!" He left in a temper. She wasn't sure how she could get over it. They seemed impossible.

She texted Joyce after failing to fall asleep.

"Everyone hates me."

"Why would anyone hate you?"

Nancy paused for a moment and then sent, *"I don't know...I don't think anyone gets me."*

"Come see me."

Nancy wasn't sure how to respond to that. She stared at her phone for only a minute before Joyce texted again.

"What else do you have planned tonight?"

After Mike told her everyone knew she did things for her it was a little unnerving. All eyes were on her.

"Nothing. I'm a huge loser lol"

"No you're not."

"I probably shouldn't. My mom she...well she's a bitch and I'm not sure what she'd do."

"You're 18 right? Who gives a shit what she thinks. She doesn't have any control over you."

Nancy almost laughed out loud. *"But it's a school night."*

"Are you telling me you've never ditched a class in your life? Wow I have a lot to teach you."

"Ok fine you talked me into it."

"Good. Just be careful coming here. There might be kids messing around my property. I think someone stole my mailbox."

Nancy climbed out her bedroom window when it was dark enough outside and grabbed her bike. There was something thrilling about going out late at night as if looking for trouble. She thought there was no one around until she caught a glimpse of a group of kids her age hanging outside someone's house on a porch. Nancy never felt this exposed, she tried not to pay any attention to them but that proved next to impossible. She could feel their stares, their judgement.

Joyce's house seemed 100 miles away. This road to Elm street seemed infinite. She didn't want to get there too late. It wasn't dark yet.

When she did arrive there was Joyce on the porch waving her over as she peddled into the driveway. Nancy threw her bike down and ran inside.

"Sorry if I scared you but it's best you're inside in case they're watching."

Nancy figured she meant the kids that would normally harass her. She followed her into a spare room. Nancy was amazed with what she saw. Newspaper headlines about the lab dating back to the 70's. There was a whole time line leading to modern day. Articles about missing people including Will in the span of the last two years.

Joyce looked over and saw the look of astonishment on the young woman's face. "I know this makes me look a little nuts but..."

"Joyce, this is great," Nancy smiled, pulling on Joyce's arm.

Joyce wasn't sure if she was just humouring her, "Really?"

"You've been at this a while," Nancy walked over to get a closer look at some black a white photos of some very uptight looking doctors; one in particular looked menacing and quite sure of himself even with a thinning hairline. "I've been looking into that lab too...but not as much as you."

She looked over some recent pictures taken outside of the lab. The dates showed Joyce had been going there every three weeks except for the last one three months. The most recent ones showed activity late at night, many gathered outside behind the huge gates of the entrance.

"I was going to go there tonight but I'm afraid that they're on to me."

Nancy didn't say anything for a minute, she simply pondered over the research done, her eyes all a glow. "We should go."

Joyce raised an eyebrow, "Are you sure about that?"

Nancy turned to her and shrugged, "What am going to do? Sit by and not spy on these A-holes?"

They both exchanged a smile. Joyce led the way. Nancy was more than happy to tag along on her expedition for the truth. She was mainly just happy she wasn't the only one who felt ill toward this shady lab.

Joyce reminded her about that trail. She was a bit suspicious it was being watched men in black. She had seen a black car with tinted windows idling there. She thought maybe they wanted to scare her. There had been no recent activity but that kept her away. They tried a different road.

"Keep low and keep quiet. If anything happens...just run and don't look back." Nancy nodded, a bit nervous but she trusted her. It took about 45 minutes. It was getting dark. Joyce got her to crouch down behind some bushes with her.

Nancy nearly gasped when she saw the masked guards by the gate. A car was being let in, not too different from the one Joyce described. Some scientists, men in white coats were there to greet someone. Nancy recognized that hairline.

"That's Martin Brenner," Joyce said with disdain, "He started this place."

They observed for several minutes. Joyce noticed Nancy had been squeezing her hand: she was freezing. Of course a girl of her size would likely need four more layers than her.

"Let's go."

"But you didn't take a picture."

Joyce gave her hand a light squeeze, "It's ok."

They made it back to her house just past midnight. They stayed up together, sitting on the sofa and wrapping a blanket around themselves.

"I can't believe it," Nancy said, "I never thought I'd see it."

"It's a good idea not to go there alone."

"When will you be going back?" Nancy yawned.

Joyce struggled to keep her eyes opened, "It will be a while. I have to be honest. I haven't had many good sleeps. I've been expecting any day now they'll kick in my door. I'm not really sure if having you here was really a good idea...but I'm glad you came."

She found Nancy asleep, leaning into her. She didn't dare move; she had no intention of getting up at this point any way. Somehow she found going to sleep a hell of a lot easier now.

More to come!